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DAVID RIGSBEE
Letum non Omnia Finit

COVER ARTWORK 'EXOPLANET' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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FEBRUARY 2026

CONTRIBUTORS

DAVID RIGSBEE
KIM PORTS PARSONS
TERRY MCDONGAH
JORDAN SMITH
SUSAN KEISER
RICHARD W HALPERIN
LYNDA TAVAKOLI
PETER A WITT
PATRICIA SYKES
PAUL WILLIAMSON
LUIS CUAUHTEMOC BERRIOZABAL
GORDON FERRIS

*Following poets translated from Arabic
by Dr Salwa Gouda*

AICHA BASSRY
DIMA MAHMOUD
FAWZIA ALAWI ALAWI
HABIBA MOHAMMEDI
NEHAD ZAKI
SAMEH MAHGOUB

David Rigsbee is the recipient of many fellowships and awards, including two Fellowships in Literature from The National Endowment for the Arts, The National Endowment for the Humanities (for The American Academy in Rome), The Djerassi Foundation, The Jentel Foundation, and The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, as well as a Pushcart Prize, an Award from the Academy of American Poets, and others. In addition to his twelve collections of poems, he has published critical books on the poetry of Joseph Brodsky and Carolyn Kizer and coedited *Invited Guest: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Southern Poetry*. His work has appeared in *Agni*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The New Yorker*, *The Southern Review*, and many others. Main Street Rag published his collection of found poems, *MAGA Sonnets of Donald Trump* in 2021. His translation of Dante's *Paradiso* was published by Salmon Poetry in 2023, and *Watchman in the Knife Factory: New & Selected Poems* was published by Black Lawrence Press in 2024.

The coda to my chapter from *Three Teachers: Kizer, Brodsky, and Rorty*.

LETUM NON OMNIA FINIT

In October 2019, I flew to Florence to spend some time with my daughter Makaiya, who had recently graduated from Harvard Law and needed to decompress before starting her first job as a public defender in Seattle. She was keen on going to Venice, and so we took a train there. She knew my real reason for wanting to go: to take a *vaporetto* and visit Joseph Brodsky's grave in the Isola di san Michele, where Ezra Pound and Olga Rudge were also buried, along with Igor Stravinsky, and Sergei Diaghilev. The walled cemetery was not especially well-kept, although there were markers and arrows aplenty to locate the graves of the noble and noteworthy. We first found Ezra Pound's grave and spent a few minutes in a photo op, but I was more interested in finding Joseph. Makaiya first spotted the tombstone, and I hurried over to take a look. I had seen photos online, but these did not do it justice in its isolation and semi-neglect. I plucked a flower from someone else's plot and lay it at the stone, which had his name, first in Russian, then life-dates, then "Joseph Brodsky" in English. A stack of three short lines, as if trying to be a tercet. It's said that Boris Yeltsin sent boxes of roses to adorn the gravesite but that they wound up at the grave of Pound instead. Both were buried in the Protestant section of the cemetery. On the reverse of the tombstone there is a legend in Latin: *Letum non Omnia Finit*. Not everything ends in death. Another photo op showed me standing behind the tombstone, looking over and across his space. I remember standing there a long time, welcoming the feelings of care and regret. Nor did I forget Joseph's remark: "For some odd reason, the expression 'death of a poet' always sounds somewhat more concrete than 'life of a poet.'" I looked older than I felt on that day.



David Rigsbee

continued overleaf...

A postcard once came in the mail. There was Botticelli's profile portrait of Dante. On the reverse, he had written, "This caught my eye. It looks like you, don't you think?—Joseph." His reverence for Dante was in line with his respect for the Greats and, to a large degree, the institutions that bound them. One had only to glance at the table of contents of his *Collected Poems in English*: a roster of classical personages to rival that of his beloved Cavafy. Behind this was the overarching theme of empire, naturally, but that empire took many forms, the most important of which was language. On the one hand, one could never, in Jameson's phrase, escape "the prison-house of language." But on the other, poets could build on it. He liked to recite Auden's lines from "In Memory of W. B. Yeats": "Time... Worships language and forgives/ Everyone by whom it lives..." "Wystan never wrote anything truer," he said. If time does anything of the sort, that would mean that time itself was subordinate to language, the very thing that marks humanity off from the rest of nature. Nature, as a result, needn't take center stage, nor need it lay claim to importance as a background for self-examination, the way it does for the Romantic poets, to whom Joseph was not particularly drawn. However, there is one exception, his poem, "The Hawk's Cry in Autumn," an example of magnificence in which the cry from the soaring raptor is the "apotheosis of pure sound."

The poem, likewise, is soaring. It's perhaps as close as he gets to a religion of poetry, but the religion also dovetails with Dante, who not only plumbs the depths with Virgil, but flies through outer space with the spirit of Beatrice on a mission to locate the source, God. Unlike Dante, the hawk doesn't find God, only weather and the earth in rotation. The hawk doesn't speak either. Its brain is the size of a berry but its "vision" is vision. Its cry is the basis of the language it foretells, though it's not built to acquire a language that ultimately evolves to offer poetry, the ultimate. There is a paradox embedded in the reasoning that touches all poets.

Joseph often spoke of Dante in these reverential terms. At the time, I only knew the Florentine through John Ciardi's popular translation of the *Inferno*. Few of us read beyond, but we intuited (or so we thought) the rest. There was perhaps a basis for taking on what is otherwise an incomplete assignment. The *Inferno* was graphic; it seized you with its demonic hooks, and you identified with both the sins and the crazy punishments. The *Purgatorio* was more of the same, but the promise torn from the souls in hell was still in effect for Purgatory's lucky characters. By the time you got to the *Paradiso*, it was felt, the journey became more abstract and gauzy, one bubble-trapped soul after another, "warbling hymns," in Milton's double-edged phrase, and making discourses on Thomas Aquinas.

Be that as it may, I had begun translating the *Paradiso*, at the suggestion of Makaiya, who thought it a fitting project for the depressed. I had retired from teaching by then and was recovering from the breakup of an 18-year marriage to my own Beatrice, who also happened to be poet Carolyn Kizer's daughter, Jill. We had remained friends and had joint interest in the upbringing of Makaiya, but we were set, both sorrowfully, I think, on different paths. It was, in Joseph's terms, grief canceling reason. Cavafy's remark lurked in the back of my thoughts: "In the dissolute life of my youth the desires of my poetry were being formed, the scope of my art was being plotted. This is why my repentances were never stable. And my resolutions to control myself, to change lasted for two weeks at the very most." The breakup with Jill was but an update of my past failures, now set squarely before me, and I felt the need of a sustaining literary project.

I knew that Joseph had taken up translation very early on in his career, and he had much to say about the implications of going from one language to the other. There was the apples-and-oranges issue between Russian and English, for example. Russian was an inflected language. Its beauty and its tools for establishing beauty were built-in: not so much in English. Under these circumstances, what could it even mean to undertake a translation? It would be a golem of a text. In the case of his own poems, Joseph insisted that everything be translated, especially the form, even if that form didn't correspond to anything native. He was militant on this point. He was more original when it came to translating other poets. For instance, he offered the idea that Cavafy's work practically cried out for translation because the dandified voices of his speakers brought forth the impression that they were already alienated. So what better way to get this sense across than to suggest that they were speaking across barriers historical, psychological, political, and linguistic? There was no unmediated voice. Even the *cri de coeur* was mediated, its source buried somewhere under the rubble of history. Joseph mentioned that Dante was in on the joke: his Pilgrim was after all an alter ego, having been translated from the historical self into a character. What's more, there was the problem of the self-defeating premise, namely the fact that the Dante character admits in the first canto of the *Paradiso* that this task, though necessary, is only an approximation, a fool's errand. It fails before it starts. We are not constructed to comprehend what he experiences, and so his tale short-circuits.

continued overleaf...

To reach heaven is promised, but having reached it we have no means to express what we've experienced. What then of the promise? Joseph said that the paradox was not limited to translation, to Dante, or indeed to any poet. It was inherent to poetry itself, which was situated on a fault-line that changed aspect every which way you turned, but that was nevertheless always there. You have to be on good terms with the silence on the other side so that you could gesture in its direction, solicit the silent void as background radiation impinging at every point on articulation, no matter how articulate the speaker. One could hardly imagine a more articulate speaker than Joseph, whether spurting the implications of paradox in the poetry of Donne and Eliot or simply making a pointed witticism whose miniature delivery ironically expanded the vastness of its meaning. Knowing the paradox of expressiveness was there, like death was there, gave one the idea that construction nonetheless counts. Hence his interest in the sturdy, if old-fashioned, poems of Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost. He praised the well-constructed, thought it succeeded on the merits. It had the virtue of furniture; it served, and you couldn't imagine living without it. You couldn't escape the paradox no matter how many Dantes you sent into the field. Or could you?

He knew that the evolution of poetic form depended on coming to grips with time. You could reconfigure time to make it favor you more. And if that were the case, might you not manipulate it? Confine it to a quotational status, unhook it from mortality? If the beauty of a poem inclined you to follow this argument, you might as well reverse-engineer Auden's lines to find that language deifies itself in our hands. No wonder Time worships it and its practitioners. No wonder Time forgives sins. It was with the memory of these conversations in mind that I sat down and began translating the *Paradiso*. As John reminds us, "In the beginning was the Word." That's fine, but it was the second word, the counter-word, that brought poetry into being, along with time and paradox. Joseph was frequently on my mind as I made my way through Dante's poem because his way of thinking, in its tenacity and reach, headed off at once to the Ultima Thule many poets tend to skip on their way to the made thing—and that destination was something else entirely, something appealing to a hawk, who, if he stopped to think about it would fall, like Icarus, out of the sky. A second postcard followed shortly. It said, "If you want a rose, follow your nose.—Joseph." On the reverse was another portrait of Dante in profile, the nose prominently Roman.



At the grave of Brodsky in 2019.

Kim Ports Parsons grew up near Baltimore, earned degrees, and worked as an educator and librarian for thirty years. Now she lives next door to Shenandoah National Park, writes, gardens, walks, and volunteers for Cultivating Voices LIVE Poetry. Her poems have been published in such journals as *Vox Populi* and *Poetry Ireland Review*, anthologies such as "Unsinkable: Poetry Inspired by the *Titanic*" (forthcoming from Salmon Poetry), and nominated for a Pushcart. Her first collection, *The Mayapple Forest* (Terrapin Books 2022), was a finalist for the North American Book Award, sponsored by the Poetry Society of Virginia. Visit her at www.KimPortsParsons.com.



ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Yellow shaft under flicker's wing
in December, echo of sunlight
on snow in years past.

Peepers in January.
Snowdrops drooping
and fading in February heat.

No need for a jacket in March,
no oriole flashing its return
in the cherry tree.

Hazy embers of pollen
dance with wildfire smoke.
Sudden gunshots in the woods.

No grand swirl of moths
in June's high beams;
the missing flare of a bob white's call.

Stand in the hover and hum
of declining bees.
Walk the brittle drought grass.

Mark each day's burning
like an urgent flash of warning
from a pockmarked lighthouse.

Kim Ports Parsons

ALL-BUT-LOST

Some clear winter morning,
when the impossible aroma of hope
wakens your senses, pause a moment.

In other fields, dusty hands harvest
the ripened grain while fancy bombs
steer themselves toward nearby towns.

On rubbled streets across mysterious
borders, posters of missing children
rattle in a gray and bitter wind.

How can there be anything
but bafflement at this
wilderness we wander?

The moon sets itself gently down
into the crooked clay bowl
of the mountain's rocky arms,

and a kinship for all
who have gone before
momentarily fills your chest.

Then a keening grows in your throat,
presses its swelling note
against the next breath.

Peace is an all-but-lost seed
in need of fertile ground and rain, or
a fragile heirloom wrapped in yellowed paper.

Muster what you can. Brace against
that long-forgotten door, stubborn
with lack of use and rust, and push—

OUTSIDE THESE MEAGRE LINES

Planting seeds this morning,
purple-podded, asparagus beans,
every few inches, along the fence,
in bright sun and rich soil,
so there's plenty of room
for vines to stretch,
for green leaves to unfurl,
for orchid-like flowers to open,
for long pods to emerge and grow,
such luscious abundance to come,
a sight for weary eyes.

Outside these meagre lines,
down the gravel road,
across miles of highway,
a plane ride over continents,
shackled, trafficked,
trucked through security gates,
crowded on cold concrete,
nearly naked men, no room
to stretch, no fresh air, no sun,
despair taking root,
blank and staring eyes.

NEWCOMER

Teach me, newcomer, teach me.
Teach me how not to smirk
and be smug
when I see you struggle

and teach me

to turn my smile to your aid
when words fail you
and your teeth chatter
like hard nails on the doorstep

and teach me

to understand the small song
you sang for us
while we rattled out
a weary Christmas hymn

and teach me

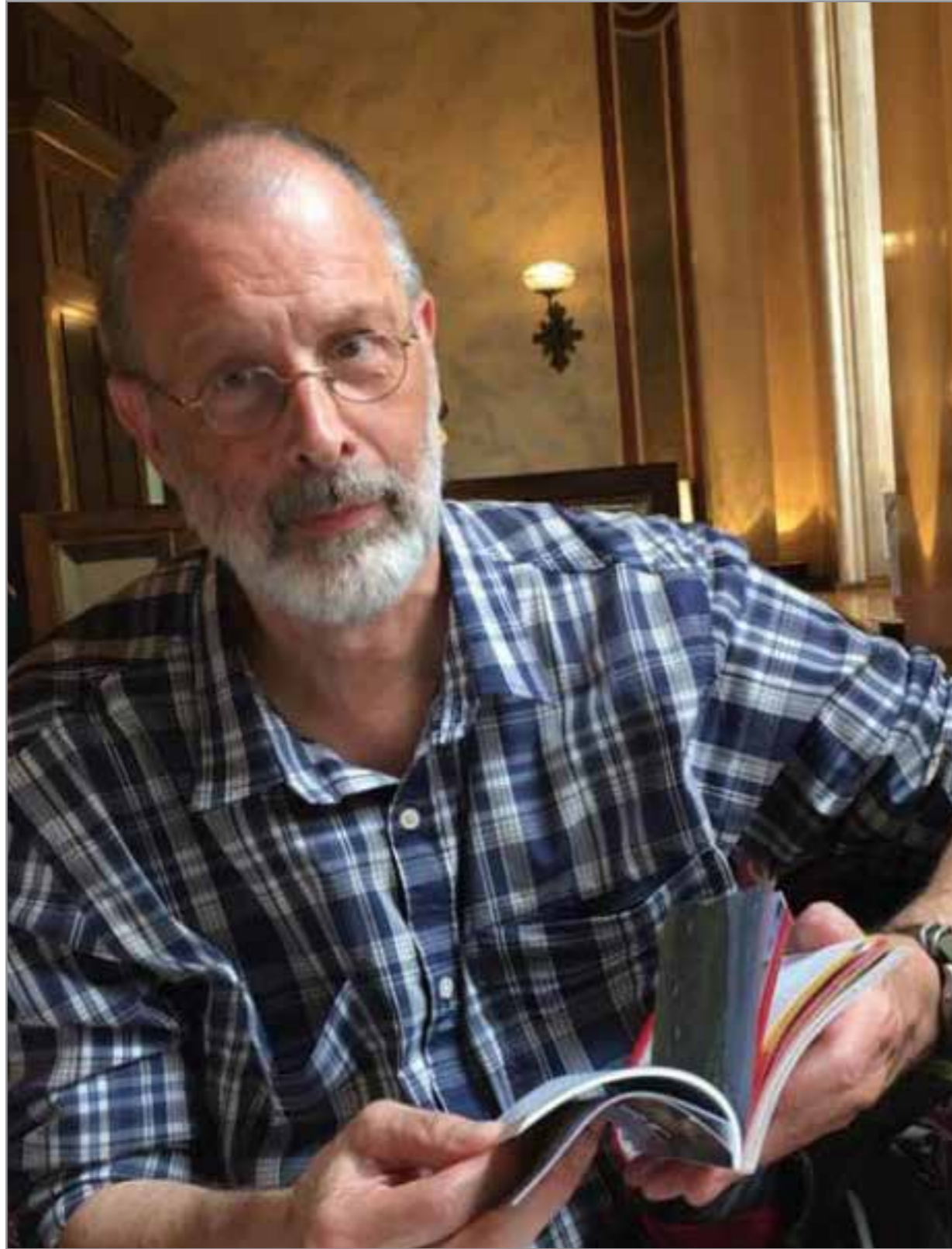
to set out for school
as a child
and to return as a teenager
ready to speak up
in songs of defiance.

Teach me.

Let me learn
the true language
of the lark
and the white dove –
let me learn from you.

Teach me.

Jordan Smith is the author of eight full-length books of poems, most recently *Little Black Train*, winner of the Three Mile Harbor Press Prize and *Clare's Empire*, a fantasia on the life and work of John Clare from The Hydroelectric Press, as well as several chapbooks, including *Cold Night*, *Long Dog* from Ambidextrous Bloodhound Press. The recipient of fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim and Ingram Merrill foundations, he is the Edward Everett Hale Jr. Professor of English at Union College.



LIBERTY

Dave calls “Cold Frosty Morning,” and starts it off on his mandolin at a nice comfortable pace. It isn’t morning, and it is only late October, but already we’d had that dawn chill, a light lace of frost on the lawns, an intimation. The rest of us join in—a trio of fiddles, more mandolins, a couple of guitars, a button box, a tin whistle. We are mostly teachers, in one way or another, some retired, one who doubled as a soccer coach and fishing guide, a librarian. We have two guests: a writer winding down a book tour with a residency in my classes who brought along his guitar, and a professional fiddler who plays for contradances around the northeast. We run “Cold Frosty Morning” five times through, and Dave holds up his foot, the usual signal to stop. Joe, sitting next to him, playing the lovely F-style mandolin he made for himself, slides right into “Kitchen Girl,” one of the first tunes we all learned when we started this weekly lunchtime session more than twenty years ago. It’s a good one. We kick the tempo up a little. I stop thinking about all the arrangements and complications and irritations and anxieties of the last month. I’m aware of the dance of my right wrist, of the woody rasp of the fiddle’s low strings under my ear, the sound somehow disconnected from anything I am doing or anyone I am. There’s not much in the world that I like better.

It is a grand session. Our writer guest sings John Prine’s “Please Don’t Bury Me.” The dance fiddler pulls out his twelve-string (another home-built instrument) and leads Lead Belly’s “Go Down, Old Hannah;” later he grabs a banjo for Uncle Dave Macon’s “We’re Up Against It Now,” as close to a political statement as we get. The writer grins. A few faculty and students wander in to listen. Someone calls “Coleman’s March,” a lovely tune, supposedly played by a fiddler on his way to the gallows. Tunes from New England, Quebec, the American south, Ireland. The banjo player has brought along her not-yet-toddler and placed him in his carrier seat in the center of the musicians. He’s smiling.

Jordan Smith. Photo credit; Malie Smith.

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Of course, there's a subtext under the shuffle rhythms, the syncopation, the danceable melodies, the group-mind that gets the musicians out of their own heads for the half-dozen choruses. "Coleman's" is a death march. "Go Down, Old Hannah" is rooted in forced labor and the migrant, relentless, backbreaking conditions that followed reconstruction. "We're Up Against It Now," however folksy the singer makes it sound, is an inventory of the havoc modernity caused rural lives and livelihoods and pleasures. The reels and jigs, from Ireland and Scotland and Quebec, carry a legacy of displacement, of exile for all sorts of reasons and the contempt that exiles face. Some well-known fiddle tunes owe their first popularity to the minstrel shows, white musicians in blackface, caricaturing the people whose music they're playing. Once in a while, one of the players might mention something about a tune's history. I like that. It's part of the occasion, but it's not the whole point.

And except for a few sidebar conversations, neither is the history of any of us. I've known some of these people for thirty years or more; some not so much. When I look around the circle, it's easy to catalogue the losses that people carry: partners or marriages, children, parents, abilities, jobs. And what they have to face up to: a recent stroke, a mother's house to be sorted after her passing, a spouse's illness, diagnosed or seemingly undiagnosable, the familiar hassles of familial care treading on job demands. And, of course, the omnipresent political grief of America in 2025. It's a wonder, I think, that some of us can find the time or the presence of mind to pick up an instrument, get it in tune, learn another jig or reel or song well enough that we can leave the sheet music home (if we ever had it to begin with). It's not an evasion, not really. The tunes themselves, and the old songs with their stories of violence or with the verses that nobody wants to sing anymore because of the truths they tell about history and suffering and the cruelty of what once seemed like humor, are too much of a presence for that.

But start playing, and the tunes are just notes in our fingers, no matter what the titles might recall, if we even recall the titles when someone has played the first few bars and we join in. Not everyone in the circle has much interest in the history of the tunes, accurate or imagined in a cloud of nostalgia for a country before the past became so contested that we can hardly see it. It's social music, not, as my fiddle teacher said once, a spectator sport. And not a history lesson, or not just one; saying something about the lineage of the tunes is another contribution to the moment of losing yourself in their music.

Still, going back to Uncle Dave's "We're Up Against It Now" reminds me of Peter Matthiessen's *Shadow Country*, where Lucius Watson, the son of the sometimes charming and thoroughly murderous Edgar "Bloody" Watson, spends his life like a drunkard spends his bucks at a bar, trying to write a biography that will transform his father from killer to rough-and-ready pioneer of Florida's cane syrup industry. Lucius has no direction home. The world he grew up in, hunting and fishing, learning and loving the glades and keys and avoiding the truths of his family and the bloodiness of making a living there, is going, going, gone to real estate scams and political connivance, and it was never an idyll to begin with. The Edgar Watson who killed his field hands instead of paying them embodied the violence of that first world, just as much as he prefigures the scheming and profiteering that drive the modernity that shouldered it aside. There's irony in Lucius' ramblings through this place that's both his and not, here and gone, and empathy in Matthiessen's treatment of his loss-riven life, but not much humor, certainly none of Uncle Dave's wry tone as he catalogues what the automobile has done to the farmers and 1920s fashions have done to their wives and daughters. But there's a common recognition of shared witness, implicit in *Shadow Country* and perfectly clear in Uncle Dave's slapstick use of the collective "we're" as he invites us to sing along on the chorus. "We're up against it now."

We're poised, all of us, between our private attritions and the destructions of a common world, which we know is a hard, often vicious place and always was except when we acted as if it wasn't. Outside, afternoon darkening, the temperature falling; we'll have another frosty morning coming. Inside this college common room, a baby is smiling at the center of a circle playing, of all things, "Coleman's March," that sweet tune marking an approaching tragedy. We know our history and we know the costs, memorialized in the music we play, just as we know all that's waiting for us when we leave, but that's not the first thing on anybody's mind right now. "Liberty," calls the next person in the circle, and we start that one off, another good tune as long as it lasts.

IN THE PINES

He listened to all the versions he could find,
From field recordings to MTV, country bands
And Cajun, and of course Huddy Ledbetter's,
And if anyone who sang it wasn't doomed,
Still they sounded like they were, and his steps
As if he'd actually been there, grew quieter
As the mix of needles and duff deepened,
Each turn of the trail marked with some
Ambiguous sign—jay's feather, broken
Finger of a branch, a whisper or snatch
Of song in the boughs, *tell me where*
Did you sleep last night-- and he put
One foot in front of the other as he'd always done,
Which is what we do, because deception is
Never where we mean to find ourselves, just
These woods we walk through.

THREADBARE

His friend said, "I saw how threadbare
My hold on life was," and he thought
Of the Donegal tweed, second-hand, rewoven
Where the lichen and russet herringbone
Snagged on a bramble when he bent
To deadhead the roses, and the moth hole
Hidden below one lapel, and the streak
Of rust where he draped it on the iron fence,
And how it would find its way soon
Enough to another thrift store or braided,
Like his father's wedding suit, into a rug
Lying for years on the same pine floor
Of the room where they said the vows.

Susan Keiser is an interdisciplinary artist who lives in a restored Gothic Victorian in Beacon, New York. Her photographs have been exhibited in solo and group shows in a wide range of galleries, museums, and art fairs and her poetry has been published in the *Stone Poetry Quarterly*. She is the winner of *The Comstock Review's* 2025 Muriel Craft Bailey Prize. You can find her online at www.susankeiserphotography.com.



SMOKING GUN

Jimmy Lock was lucky enough
to have parents who were never home.
With pockets full of matches and no place to go
he was irresistible to us kids
who followed him despite stern warnings.

Jimmy Lock bought us cigarettes
and taught us to smoke, insisting we inhale
though it made us sick. Bored,
we pressed the tips through dead leaves,
making cinder halos that smoldered orange
when we used them to spy at the sun.

Jimmy Lock was too old to be playing with us,
except for maybe my sister—
I know they were alone in his house once
but never found out what happened.

Bad skin, short blonde lashes,
I can still see him walking toward me
thin lips pressed tight.

No words form.
No smile breaks.

Susan Keiser

WISCONSIN DEATH TRIP

1.

Cousin Edna, our relation by habit not blood, owned the town's only flower shop, which she tended in a wilted kitchen apron, hair tidied in bobby-pinned curls, hands gloved in leather when she handled thorns. Inches taller than me even in her moccasins, she smothered me in a bear hug the day we met and my mother ordered flowers for grandmother Caroline's funeral—white spider mums for the altar and pink sweetheart roses for the coffin spray. I was the only one surprised it was just the three of us in the pews when the gleaming cherry casket arrived at the door and taped organ music washed over the marble floor stained by streaming glass saints.

Grandmother's neighbors were all at her wake the night before, bustling past me at the door where I stood refusing to go inside and look at the dead body put to bed in a satin-lined box. But seeing Cary in her coffin was why they showed up—to chat about how well she looked, or not, and to inspect the daughter who left years ago and never visited. The day we picked out the casket my mother told me that when grandmother found out she was dying, she pulled my mother onto her bed to whisper that she hated her, she'd always hated her, and she prayed for her to get cancer too.

Caroline was buried next to my grandfather, his brothers, his parents, and his grandparents, in the last available grave in the family plot. We followed her out of the church, then followed the hearse to the cemetery and watched without speaking as she was lowered into the ground and covered with dirt, grateful for the music coming from a large funeral several plots over, a mixed tape of hymns and pop songs—"How Great Thou Art" and "Dust in the Wind." My mother held the rose spray in front of her like a shield until the workers were finished and arranged it on the mound.

continued overleaf...

2.

There was a parade the day we left.
Heat shimmered the pavement
in that crazy way that looks like water
and takes the now out of time.

Flags hauled up poles at dawn
hung stripes in the too-heavy air
as crepe-papered car floats inched by,
local luminaries waving in slow motion
as they'd been taught was proper
and the way it was done by royalty.

Trapped on the wrong side of Main
we drove block by block past
orange-coned intersections,
glimpsing the festivities in noisy bursts,
like watching one of those sprocketed
old movies played too many times.

It made no sense this parade—
the flying batons and Sousa marches—
until I remembered the Fourth of July,
and the delays caused my mother to panic
that we would miss our flight—

a panic that grew on board into quiet cries
she was having a heart attack,
cries that only I was allowed to hear,
until we reached New York
and she was fine.

We arrived on the flight path
that takes planes over the entire length
of the island. Outside my window
I watched the fireworks silently flame
up from the river.

ROSA PTERACANTHA

is a rose with razor-winged thorns
glowing bloody when backlit
like waves atop a red sea rolling
up each bristled stem
of a rose cane of thorns
with pearl-budded flowers
four-petaled not five
blue foliage like pleats
on skirts forever pressed
like a rose herbarium specimen
or a watercolor by Redouté
court painter to Marie-Antoinette
of the one quote like you Gertrude
your Rose Period portrait
looking more like Picasso
than you, O Gertrude,
O so singular Gertrude, you
who could not be pretty
chose to be wise.



Photograph © Wendy Cutler from Vancouver, Canada. Wikipedia.

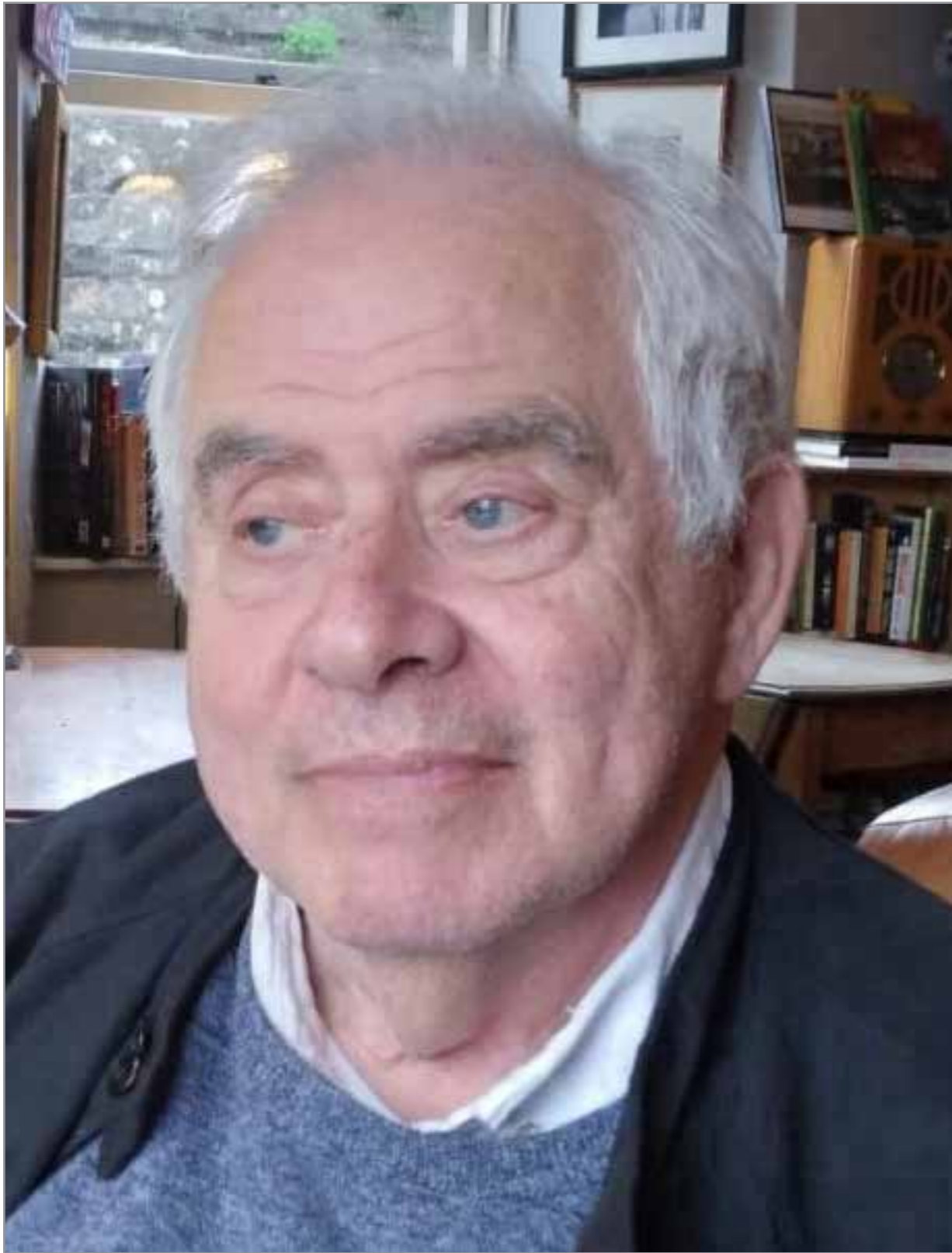
Richard W. Halperin holds U.S.-Irish dual nationality and lives in Paris. On 1 November 2025, Salmon Poetry/Cliffs of Moher brought out *All the Tattered Stars: Selected & New Poems*, Introduction by Joseph Woods, which showcases 92 poems published by Salmon and by Lapwing/Belfast since 2010 and 26 new poems. On 7 January 2026, Mr Halperin was Special Guest Reader in the First Wednesday Poetry and Open-Mic Series, White House Bar, Limerick.

On January 19, the poem '*Now, Mother, What's the Matter?*' from the new collection appeared in *The Guardian* as *Poem of the Week*.

COMPASSION, OR THE LIFE OF RICHARD SAVAGE

For those who would like to read a portrait written with love, sadness and mercy, of a man who, in life, was often impossible to get along with but who was sweet, I would recommend Samuel Johnson's 'The Life of Richard Savage,' a now-forgotten poet. The essay intermingles Richard Savage's suffering with Samuel Johnson's suffering in writing about it.

One has known people for whom one has great affection but who become, over time, impossible. I have known a few such. They had lost their capacity to *co-operate* with friendship. In that regard, the exquisite portrait of Richard Savage helps me. If mercy can be a *métier*, may I begin to learn it.



Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

STATES OF GRACE

I once had the good fortune to see
 Julie Harris as Emily Dickinson
 in *The Belle of Amherst*.
 She was in a state of grace.
 The stock market is illusion.
 States of grace are quite real.
 I write these lines in Ireland.
 John F. Kennedy in his Ireland visit
 in the summer of 1963
 said he would be back soon.
 Hope, good humour –
 it is possible in politics.
 There it was.
 Over the last few days
 several people have mentioned
 that visit to me.
 He is back.
 He is all over the place here.

BOWLS OF LIGHT

I think there is a bond between
 Samuel Johnson's common reader
 and Seamus Heaney's human chain.

The common reader – not experts –
 determines what books shall live
 over the centuries by continuing

to buy them. The human chain –
 the passing down from one person
 to the next of a favourite thing –

a book, a bucket, a story – gives
 strength and reality to our
 chaotic world. A friend once told me

that his mother, on Saturday night
 before Easter, would place
 a bowl of water on the kitchen

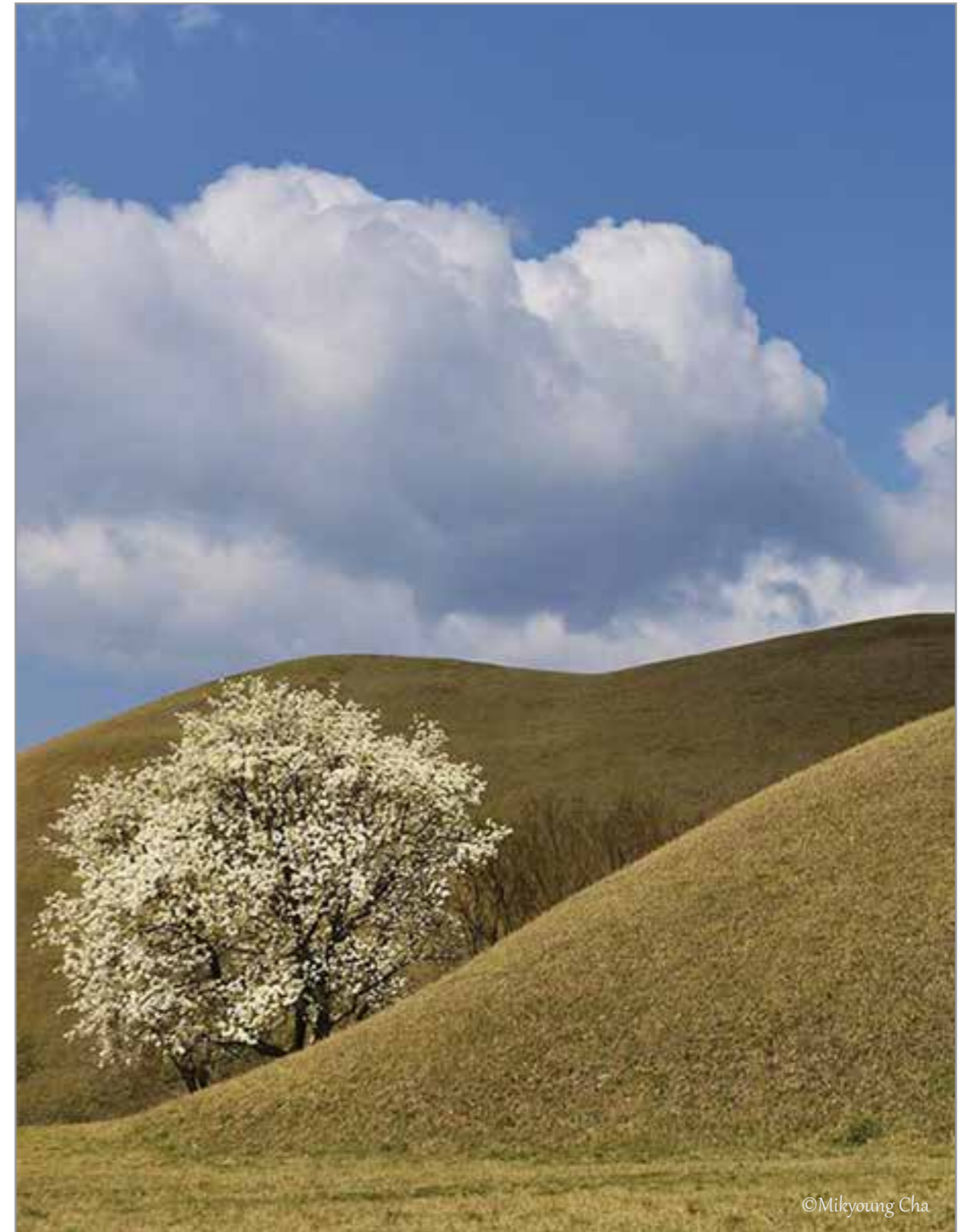
window sill, so that when
 the morning sun hit it,
 it would become, briefly,

a bowl of light. I am glad he
 told me the story. I am glad of
 bowls of light.

QUALITY AND MAGNITUDE

'Never say you know the last word about the human heart.'
- the opening sentence of 'Louisa Pallant'

A longtime friend died peacefully here last night.
Like me, American-born and raised;
a resident of France; a working artist.
I am glad – it helps – that a few days ago
I reread Henry James's short story
'Louisa Pallant.' In a collection of
seventeen of his short stories, commentaries
by Clifton Fadiman, in a 1945
Random House Modern Library edition.
All the evil in the world – in this case,
between mother and daughter – is described,
but not entirely understood, in beautifully
weighted prose and set in lovely locales
amongst the lakes of Italy and Switzerland.
This is God Bless America. Quality,
magnitude and commerce: Henry James,
Clifton Fadiman, Donald Klopfer and
Bennett Cerf who founded Random House.
Everything aimed at the mainstream.
This is *Moby Dick*, also Modern Library.
Madness slowly exposed and left that way.
The balm of art. In these instances, American
art. In grief, great art – 'Old Man River,'
'Delta Dawn' – can be applied topically.
My friend died. I apply it.



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Photograph © Mikyong Cha

Lynda Tavakoli lives in County Down, Northern Ireland where she has facilitated adult creative writing classes for a number of years and worked as a tutor for the Seamus Heaney Award for schools. She is a professional member of The Irish Writers Centre and has been nominated for both the *Best of the Net* and *The Pushcart Prize*. A poet and novelist, Lynda's work has been published worldwide with Farsi, Spanish and Arabic translations. She has won a number of international poetry and short story awards and been published in numerous journals and anthologies including *Live Encounters Magazine*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *The Galway Review*, *Skylight47*, *Abridged*, *CAP Seamus Heaney Anthologies*, *Eat the Storms*, *Drawn to the Light Press*, amongst many others. Lynda's debut poetry collection, *The Boiling Point for Jam* received wide acclaim for its raw honesty and authenticity while her latest collection *A Unison of Breaths* has been published by Arlen House.



Lynda Tavakoli

WHAT IT DOES TO YOU

The intrigue

the plain brown envelope
the name misspelt
the address sketchily penned
with malevolence
by some unknown hand

Interesting

The opening

the folded white A4
the photocopied sheet
no prints but mine then (clever)
the six lines of loathing
magnified in black ink

Really?

The follow up

the police the questions
the who why what when
of the perpetrator
the forensics
the underlying threat

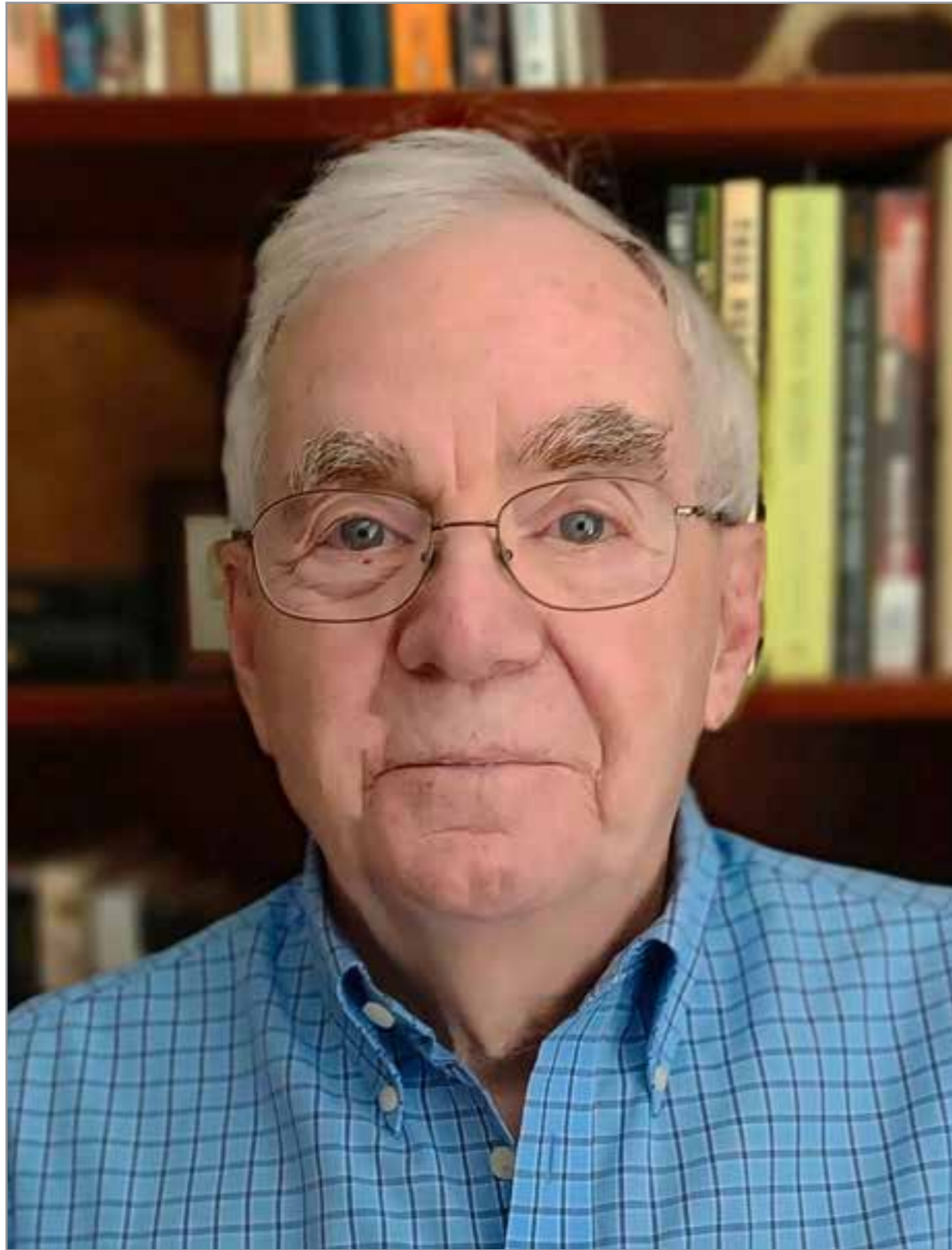
For Fuck's sake

The aftermath

the wondering
the knowing that life
has altered just like that
the boiling anger at the risk
you suddenly need to take

just to put your name at the bottom of a bloody poem

Peter A Witt is a Texas poet and a retired university professor. Peter's poetry deals with personal experiences, both real and imagined. He is a twice published Best of the Net nominee. His poetry has been published on various sites including Inspired, Open Skies Quarterly, Medusa's Kitchen, Active Muse, New Verse News, and Blue Bird Word. When not writing poetry, Peter is an avid birder and wildlife photographer.



MEDIAN ELEGY

Along the median between six roaring lanes,
 three northbound, three south,
 the curbside wildflowers weep
 like mourners at a roadside wake
 as behemoth tractors descend,
 twelve-foot blades whirring like rotary guillotines,
 mowing down unsuspecting bluebonnets,
 Indian paintbrush, and evening primrose,
 grinding them into confetti of leaves and crushed petals.

Their severed stems reveal what lies beneath,
 paper cups, waxy wrappers,
 the greasy ghosts of fast-food meals,
 all disgorged by hurried hands
 too lazy to wait for a trash can,
 too indifferent to beauty's brief tenure.

Other drivers murmur their dismay,
 why not let the blooms finish their final dance?
 Why the rush to unveil the detritus?
 They know, deep down, that calls
 to the highway department
 will yield only the shrug of bureaucracy,
 soft-spoken sympathy
 and no change in the merciless schedule.

Peter A Witt

KERRVILLE AFTER THE RAIN

The Guadalupe River rose like a beast unchained,
gnashing at bridges with foam-flecked teeth,
its roil a griefquake that swallowed the day,
children's slumber interrupted by sleepless terror.

Picnic tables floated with vicious intent,
tangled in branches like forgotten vows,
beneath skies that stormshuddered blue to black,
while prayers clung to porch rails like ivy.

The river mirewhirled with roiled trees and toys,
bibles, shoes, and fireworks now shipwrecked hopes,
and silence followed like a stray dog,
refusing to leave the wreck behind.

A flag caught in a fence began to twitch,
its stars like tears on a wrinkled face,
while the wind soulspilled across the fields,
and survivors stood, soaked with remembering.

SUNDAY AT THE BRIAR PATCH CAFÉ

Meet me at our usual spot
where yellow awnings bloom like sunflowers
spilling gold across the sidewalk,
and the tables hum with stories
told between sips of strong coffee
and laughter that skips like stones.

The street is a soft symphony,
chatter and clink, footsteps and breeze,
the rustle of leaves overhead
a lazy lullaby for the heat-drunk noon.

Meet me where couples lean in like vines,
entwined in soft secrets and subtle smiles,
while friends scatter joy like confetti
over empty cups and crumbed plates,

where a red car naps at the curb,
its engine stilled like a dreaming dog,
and the windows above
watch with the quiet wisdom of stained glass.

Come when the shadows start to stretch,
and the golden light slips sideways,
we'll sit beneath the saffron umbrellas,
breathe in the scent of syrup and stories,
and let the soft spell of the Briar Patch
wrap around us like summer's sigh.

Patricia Sykes is a poet and librettist. Her poems and collections have received various awards, including the Newcastle Poetry Prize, John Shaw Neilson award and the Tom Howard Poetry Prize. She has read her work widely and it has featured on ABC radio programs *Poetica* and *The Spirit of Things*. Her collaborations with composer Liza Lim have been performed in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Paris, Germany, Russia, New York and the UK. She was Asialink Writer in Residence, Malaysia, 2006. A selection of her poems was published in an English/Chinese edition by Flying Island Books in 2017. A song cycle composed by Andrew Aronowicz, based on her collection *The Abbotsford Mysteries*, premiered at The Abbotsford Convent Melbourne — now an arts precinct — in 2019. A podcast of this work is available on various platforms.



A NEED FOR GENTLE VERBS

After ferocities of loss
 some of the bushfires
 still burning, the setting sun
 a fireball, hazed and hazing,
 casualties rising by the hour
 wildlife, domestic herds,
 homes, livelihoods

the brutalised earth
 in the grip of heat's mirage
 struggles to open its lungs
 nights become sleepless
 packed treasures
 wait by the door
 for evacuation orders

while helicopters prowl
 the forest canopy
 for telltale smoke;
 mornings become a gift
 when beneath my feet
 the foothills continue
 to breath gently, kindly

Patricia Sykes

Paul Williamson lives in Canberra. He has published poems on a range of topics in Australia, NZ, the US, UK, Canada and Japan. His collections include *A Hint of Eden*, *Along the Forest Corridor*, and *Edge of Southern Bright*, published by Ginninderra Press. His background is in Earth Sciences.



MEMORIES OF TRAVEL

Sydney's grime and familiar striving
 Tokyo with business and blossoms
 Bali hoping for sunny peace
 Bangkok's temples and floating shops
 Djakarta full of living
 Seoul with kimchi and inner strength
 Hong Kong busy with commerce
 Mumbai's crowded history

Washington filled by intrigue
 Doha flush with oil money
 Ottawa in frozen hope
 Mexico's patterned colour
 Santiago under clouded Andes

Barcelona's mystic art
 Lisbon with sea swept history
 Dublin living its culture
 Rome a seed of God
 Paris with vistas of art
 London where my children were born.

Paul Williamson

BALANCING

When young we walked low wooden fences
arms out for balance
fell off onto fresh grass
rolled and laughed
climbed up again
wanting only to reach
the next turn.

Now we tread stone walls
with our chosen company
balancing, looking
before each careful step
trying not to slip.
When another wall meets ours
we greet each other hopeful.

A GOODBYE

Pausing her hunt to hover above
during nesting stays
the light phase little eagle watched me
watching her from some trail in the reserve.
Doubtless she saw me better.

The pair came back each year to breed
and raise a fledgling to fly the wide country
but in the last two seasons
her mate did not return from the south
where he overwintered.
She spent months alone guarding an empty nest.

At our last encounter she hovered briefly
mere metres away, watching me eye to eye on a hilltop.
Perhaps she was saying goodbye to a neighbour.
She left early and has not returned.

Born in Mexico, Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal lives in California and works in Los Angeles. He is the author of *Raw Materials* (Pygmy Forest Press), *Make the Water Laugh* (Rogue Wolf Press), and *Peering into the Sun* (Poet's Democracy). His recent poetry has been featured in *Blue Collar Review*, *Live Encounters*, *Mad Swirl*, *Oddball Magazine*, and *Unlikely Stories*.



SOMETHING INTERESTING

Night's mind is the moon.
Its bones are the stars.
Its blood is the darkness.
The rest is just nothing
To be concerned with.
Its tantrums are the comets
And meteors that blast
Through the sky.
Don't get me talking about
The sun, the clouds, and
The rain. You will need to
Pull up a chair. It is going
To take forever to make up
Something interesting.

Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal

BE INVISIBLE

I live in a land that
could do without me.
I take my eyes out so
I could no longer see.

I try to be invisible
to hide away from death.
I use all my strength to
bring night over the day.

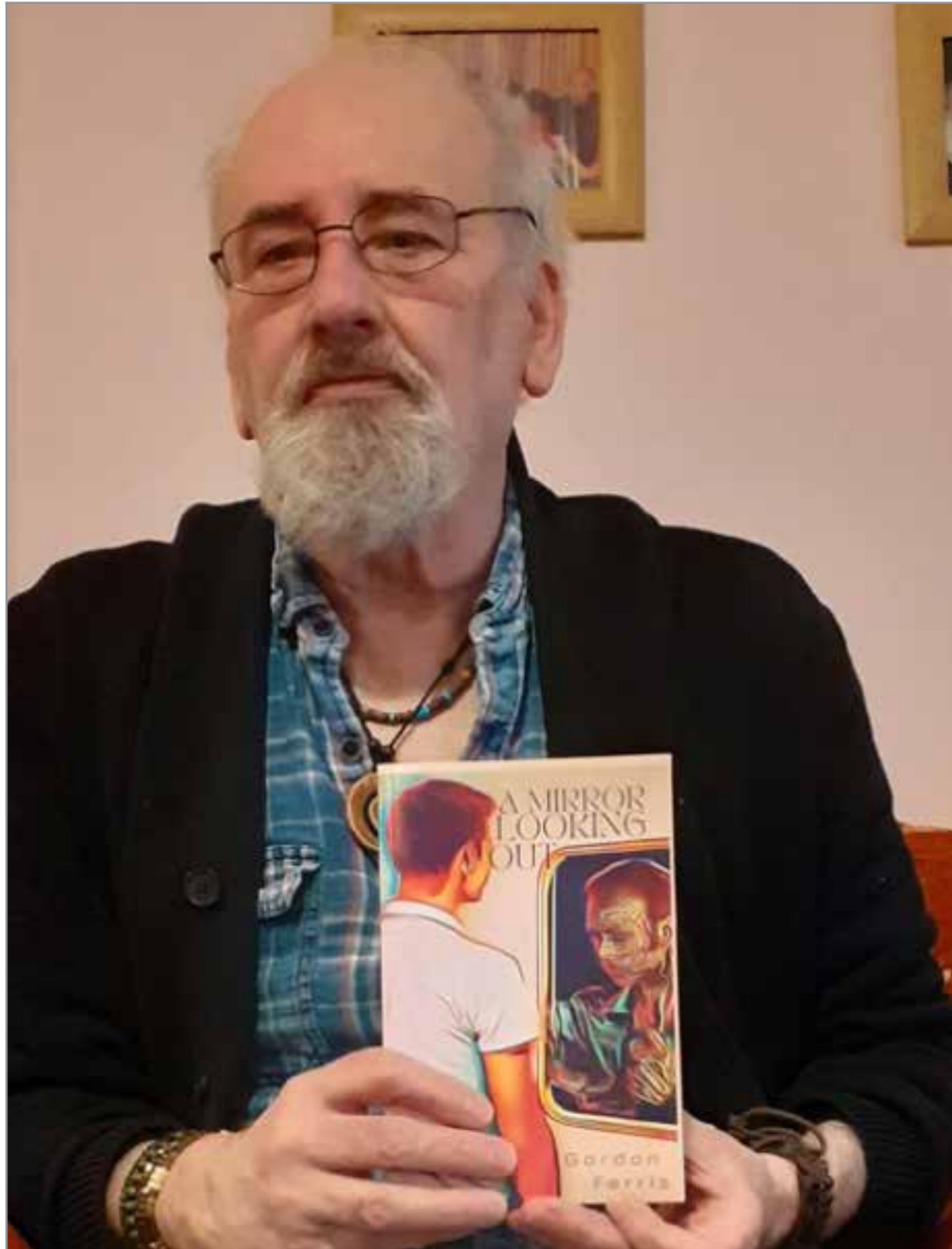
With grace I spread all my
ashes through the air.
I confuse the ocean waves
with the sky and clouds.

I laugh as I submerge
my body under water
where there are no shadows,
where I disappear.

NIGHT IS A RUMOR

Night is a rumor,
a fable to the day,
preposterous to
exist with summer
under a glorious
sun breaking through
the thinnest of clouds
suspended over blue
skies. Around 6pm
and 7pm the sun's
brilliance and euphoria
waned as dementia
sets in and the myth
and rumor of night
becomes a promise.
It blankets the blue
skies, turns off the
day's switch, blows
out the sun's candle.

Gordon Ferris was born and raised in Finglas, a North West suburb of Dublin. In the early eighties, he moved to Donegal where he has lived ever since. He started writing in 2014 and has had many short stories and poems in publications including Hidden Channel, A New Ulster, The Galway Review, Impspired Magazine, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Corncrake Magazine, Flare Magazine and Live Encounters. He has also won prizes in the summer 2020 HITA Creative Writing Competition for his poem 'Mother' and was joint winner in the winter competition for his poem 'The Silence'. Poetry Ireland awarded Gordon a, Poetry Town Bursary in 2022. In January 2023, Impspired published his first book, *Echoes*, a short story collection. In December, Impspired published his second book, *A Mirror Looking Out*, a poetry collection, under the brilliant guidance of the late Steve Cawte.



JOURNEY

Leaving the Mater Hospital on the north circular road exit, using the merry-go-round of an automatic door, careful not to get pushed out, by someone in a hurry, sending him flying.

Onto the North Circular, on to Dorset Street towards the city centre. He could have got the bus but thought he might as well walk while the sun shined.

Having lived in rural Ireland for many years and lost his city ways, it was difficult to resist the temptation to wave at all the cars passing, (imagine the sore arm he would have if he tried that) He found himself smiling and nodding at all the people he passed, immediately reigning himself in, embarrassed when he realized what he was doing.

Onto Blessington Street, glancing at the apartment where many years earlier his virginity had been lost. (*careless of him*) Still, the same bright red door after all these years, recollecting the attic room, where the stars could be seen from the skylight window that dripped water into a pot, he imagined how she probably has changed, probably married now with kids, a dog, a cat, or both. She probably lived in Enfield, her home town, she was of monied parents. Way above his station he thought.

He loved and hated the trips to Dublin for the outpatient appointments in The Mater every six months, loved the journey on the bus, where one could choose to be alone, thinking clearly without being distracted by a million little things that popped into his head or caught his eye, be it real, imagined, people he knew or stranger's. The thing that annoyed him most, of course, was being probed and poked by the doctors, and waiting for the results, with the slim possibility that he could be kept in, (it had happened many times before.) But thankfully not this time. He had been having good results in recent visits, after being persuaded to change his lifestyle by the painful procedures and by the life-threatening illnesses he endured. He hadn't to go back now for a year, an improvement on his usual six-monthly visits.

Gordon Ferris

continued overleaf..

So on now past Walton Music shop he walked with purpose, not sure if he was going to get the early bus home or go for a ramble through the city streets, rekindling memories of his past, hoping and to some extent dreading the slim possibility he could run into some of those people who haunted his past.

He decided to cross the road at the Garden Of Remembrance, and head towards Moore Street and Henry Street via Parnell Square, memories flooding back of a childhood he cherished, with probably exaggerated fondness.

Passing the Rotunda hospital he recalled the night his firstborn came into the world. He remembered the excitement, the nervousness when he held his daughter for the first time, afraid he would squeeze her too tight, or let her drop, but then he felt her tiny hand grip his thumb and knew things were all right with the world that day.

Past Dunnes and Pennies, resisting the temptation to enter the usual shops he frequented when he needed new clothes, but shopping bored him, he hated it, he preferred the times his ex-wife, or his mother used shop for him, but that wasn't possible anymore. Now when he needed anything, he did his shopping as quickly as possible, if they sold clothes in bookshops or music stores he would be the best-dressed man in Donegal.

In O'Connell Street he decided to go somewhere for coffee, but not into one of those fancy coffee shops, where they sell you many different types of coffee at exorbitant prices and then expect you to leave a tip, No. He would go into the Sackville Lounge where his Grandad was a regular many years ago and bought his first pint.



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Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Aicha Bassry is a distinguished Moroccan poet, novelist, and storyteller. She is the author of multiple acclaimed novels and poetry collections. Her work has been honored with several prestigious awards, including the International Kateb Yassin Prize for the Novel (Algeria, 2016) for *Greta Garbo's Granddaughters*, the Simone Landry Prize for Women's Poetry (Paris, 2017) for her collection *The Bathers in Thirst*, and the Award for Best Arabic Novel in 2018 at the Sharjah International Book Fair (UAE). Bassry's writing has reached a global readership through translation into English, French, Spanish, Italian, and Turkish. She is a frequent participant in major cultural forums across the Arab world and internationally, contributing to book fairs, literary festivals, and conferences.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.



FOLDS OF THE SCARF

Between the folds of my scarf, he tucked his fingers,
and counted them, fold by fold:
a fold of love,
a fold of absence,
a fold of forgetting,
a fold of disappointment,
a fold of memory,
a fold of death.
In pain, I do not trust a man
I trust the scarf's soft moan.

Aicha Bassry

THE COMMANDMENTS

Make me the icon of your chest,
atone for the worst of sins.

Guard your tongue, speak with your heart,
and a window of my secrets will open for you.

Take me as the woman I am
I will restore your wildness and the dew of your youth.

Follow my scent,
be patient with what is mysterious in me,
for no man before you has ever fathomed a woman's depths.

Be a nectar that rises through the veins,
prune back the branches of me that stray,
until the flower of eternity blooms in your palm.

Draw me as a cloud on the horizon of your soul
I will rain with shyness each time your breeze caresses me.

Tuck me away like a tear between your lashes,
and I will fall like rain
each time the tree of your sorrow blooms.

Hide me like a secret word between your lines,
a drop of perfume in your ink. Keep my name close,
for no poet who reveals his beloved's name
lets the poem live.

Do not trust all the honey that drips from my lips
some of it is the weeping of your own wounds.

Long ago,
I caught my reflection in the river's mirror,
was startled by my own beauty, and so loved you
from the overflow of that love, I created you.
So beware—do not let the crystal of my body slip from your hands,
lest I become your eternal ache.

A NURSERY OF KISSES

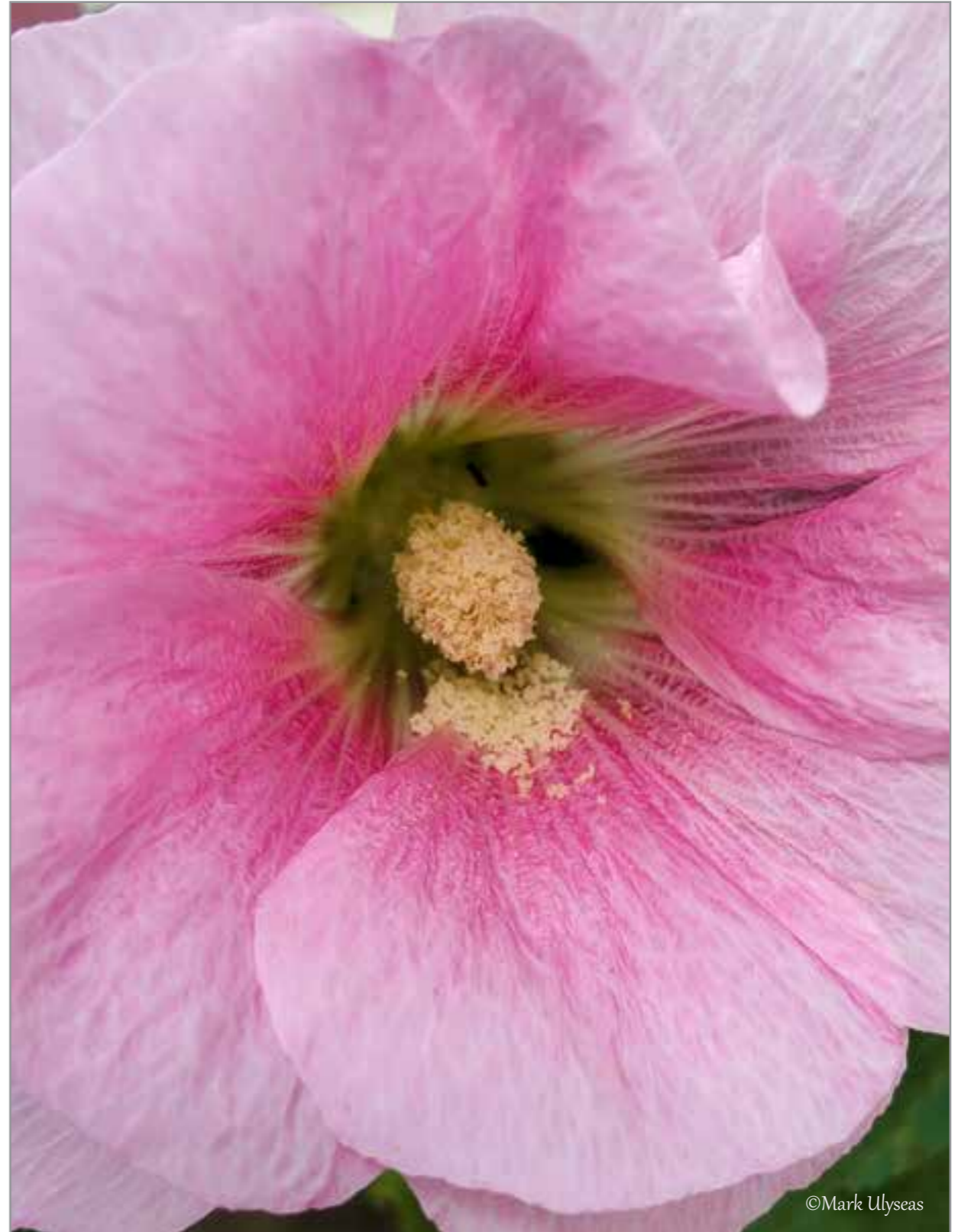
Whenever your lips touch
a marble-smooth part of my body,
from sheer shyness
the blossoms of sleep fall away.
By daybreak,
the bed had filled
with flowers,
and with kisses that had fallen.

IGNITION

When you become both the fire and the straw,
know that no ocean can quench you
except a sip of her mouth's nectar.
So worship like an ember in its own flame,
crack open like clay in her hands.
Then prepare for the sweetness of water—
perhaps,
perhaps she will take pity and lead you to the spring.

YOUR HEART IS IN YOUR EYES

Your eyes—the blue ones,
the green ones,
the gray ones,
colorless ones.
Rejoice a little so I may see the sea.
Look at me so I may see the world's green.
Be angry a little so I may see the cloud.
Your heart is in your eyes—
it never has,
and never will be,
the possession of one woman,
but rather
a crossing-point for many.



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Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Dima Mahmoud is an Egyptian poet and a professional voiceover artist, broadcaster, and radio actress. A graduate in Computer Science and Statistics from King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, she has authored several poetry collections, including *Spiritual Braids* (2015), *Challenging the Horizon with a Violin* (2017), *With Tenderness, He Inscribes His Papyrus* (2021), *Bitten Fingers in a Bag* (which won second prize in the Helmy Salem Award for New Poetry in 2021), and *A Shadow and a Tremor – Songs for the Wind* (2023). Two further collections are forthcoming. Her work has been translated into numerous languages—including English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Bengali, and Chinese—and has appeared in international journals, websites, and printed anthologies. She has actively participated in local, Arab, and global poetry and cultural festivals.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.



COLLAGE

I'll brew our coffee from crow feathers
so it's dark enough for this room.
We can stain our bodies with it, mercilessly, so we never want escape,
or I'll make it a charm so morning never comes.

I'll try it as lipstick, pressed onto your lips,
then we'll keep copies—not a few—of our mouths in the mirror.

I'll draw a tree on the wall across from the window,
and with my fingertips I'll pull its branches
so we can play and swing together.
And if it must bear fruit,
I'll hide inside your chest like a fetus learning the alphabet,
until I come to you, walking.

I'll ferment it with raisins, to sweeten the breath of your stone,
when you ask the angels to spread their wings on the ceiling and sleep
while we perform our injustice with a tender whirling.

It wouldn't be strange to dye my hair its color,
sparing only a streak of white.

I'll set it free so we can toast to our pleasure
while we let the sky fall like feathers over our bodies,
and then we'll fly.

Dima Mahmoud

A BALCONY AND A HOUSE IN CASABLANCA

Looking at myself on the horizon's line, my voice fell from me.
Had love flung its doors open wide,
I would not still be opening windows each night and waiting.

I used to gaze at myself in the building's details,
in the fine dust that drifts in silence
so no one would turn to it, claiming to restore the luster—
in its screaming quiet, its unspoken words saying:
I cling so I may hide, or I stay,
resisting the crowd and the call of roaming vendors,
and a kiss left on the sidewalk.

I will tell the cloud suspended behind me
of my defeats as well as my endless victories.
I will entrust the small balconies along the street
to carry my heavy bags.
I emptied my pockets to be light as I cling to you.

I will not wait for passersby—not because I fear them,
but because I've swallowed the warm air of the house
and the scent of its ancient memory.

Perhaps then love will turn to me and swing its doors open.
Only then did my fingers hesitate to emerge,
the morsel in my throat hanging between two absences.
I straightened up so passersby wouldn't think me wingless.

Your whisper called to me in my armpit,
the rose that had just scattered in my mouth,
your name—which for forty years still gives me the same shudder
when I hear it.



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Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Fawzia Alawi Alawi is a Tunisian poet, novelist and essayist who has published nine poetry and short story collections, in addition to a novel entitled "Faces for One Woman" (2020). She also won several national and regional awards.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.



LONGING

Oh, bird of longing, we are parched.
Oh tremor of the soul, tell him:
We have fallen in love.

Oh, interpreters of speech, come to our aid
We have grown mute from too much desire.
Oh masters of verse, recite a poem for us,
For when you fall silent, we lose our way.
Were it not for words that soothe the lover's wound,
We would have lived our days and died.

Fawzia Alawi Alawi

PRIDE

Do not squeeze love from anyone.
 Do not leave your buckets to the wind.
 A sudden rain-cloud may surprise you,
 filling the cups of your heart
 till water spills onto sidewalks and balconies
 and passersby's shoes are soaked
 they will stare at your wild-growing face,
 at the iris blooming above your brows.

Do not scatter seeds for the sensitive.
 She alone
 searches for your hidden bud
 in the whispers of the sap,
 waits till it emerges,
 then comes in flocks, circling it
 like lovers in devotion.

Do not wait for anyone.
 Waiting is for trains and planes
 and bank balances,
 for news bulletins stained
 with children's eyes and women's breasts
 and party statements
 inked in restrooms.

Longing comes stealthily,
 mixed-blooded,
 with feet of cotton and a sheet of dawn,
 a mane the weary moon has combed.

Longing does not knock.
 It does not ask permission.
 It has no passport, no stamps.

You rise on a chilly morning,
 find it there in the neglected corner
 sipping a perfumed brew,
 reminding you of a tree whose name you've forgotten
 but know like your mother's face.

It smokes a pipe of chance
 your heart leaps, your ribs tremble.

It signals to you with smiles
 too vast for books of poetry.
 You walk toward it without feet,
 sit in its presence, awed,
 as if before an illuminated saint.

"Welcome"—your lips do not say it.
 The sparrows on your balcony say it,
 and the raindrops.

ESTRANGEMENT

We were not companions,
nor a flash of lightning in your galaxy.
We were not two clouds fighting over
who would water the wheat,
who would feast the heart of the pomegranate flower.
We were not travelers racing for fortune,
nor a shell abandoned by the train.
We were not two roses thrown by chance and passion,
nor a snowflake melting on the cheek at dawn.
We were two dreams crossing in a doze,
two extinguished stars
traveling through daylight.



Photograph © Mark Ulyseas



Habiba Mohamadi is a well-known Algerian poet, writer, and academic who writes modern poetry and opens her text to experimentation between the flash poem, the painting, the fragment, and the epigram. She has many poetry collections and has a long history of writing for the Egyptian, Algerian, and Arab press. She has several collections of poetry and intellectual works. The most famous of them are: "The Kingdom and Exile," "Fractures of the Face," "The Overflow of Exile," "Time in the Open," "Anklets," and other works, and some of her works have been translated into foreign languages such as English, French, and Spanish. And her latest intellectual publications: A book about the relationship between poetry and philosophy in philosophical thought, with "Nietzsche" as an example, entitled *The Lust for Wisdom, the Madness of Poetry*, issued by the Egyptian General Book Authority. She was honored in Algeria, and in several Arab and foreign countries, including, but not limited to, an honor from the Supreme Council of the Arabic Language in Algeria for her excellence in writing in the Arabic language and her efforts to preserve it. Her last honor was from the General Syndicate of the Egyptian Writers Union in 2023, and she was awarded the Union Shield as the first Arab writer to receive the Egyptian Writers Union Shield.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.

HOMELAND OF THE HEART

I

My homeland's sun is too fierce to bear
That's why I dwell in the shelter of its light,
With half my soul at rest,
And half set adrift,
And half all longing,
By a basin of still water.
Do I dissolve, or do I swim? It's all the same,
For water alone is always true.

I wrap myself in layers of meaning,
A ghost I flee, a dream I can't hold.
This is how the spaces between us keep us bound,
Until life leans down, cupping us gently in its palm.
We drink a few spare drops of life's honey,
Only for its sweetness to undo us in the end.

We were born of mothers
Who bore us alone. A lonely rock once held me;
Sisyphus clutched the hem of my shirt
Together we rolled that stone
Upward,
Downward.
Just so, we turn the great wheel of meaning,
The music of life passing between us,
Until each of us becomes a mountain of memory.
But it doesn't matter—we make our meaning from life's gravel.
Home is the ritual that remains,
A solitary word in its own dictionary.
Home is the heart of who we are.
Its language
Is love.

Habiba Mohamadi

II

Somewhere between my bones,
A tear falls. A strand of longing
Wraps around me like a necklace,
And I fasten my grief with it.
Meanwhile, my soul keeps asking,
“From what star did we both fall,
That we should meet here?”

III

In the warm coral of your being,
A few of my poems live,
Full of secrets. Yet when I rise
A luminous moon,
My womanhood calls out
While in the courtyard of time,
A girl plays with a glass sphere
Your heart calls the moon.



Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Nehad Zaki is an Egyptian poet, journalist, and writer, born in December 1987. Recognized for her evocative literary voice, she was awarded the Buland Al-Haidari Prize for Young Arab Poets in 2022. Beyond poetry, Zaki is a multidisciplinary artist with a passion for drawing, fine arts, film criticism, philosophy, and literature. Her intellectual curiosity spans the broader human sciences, enriching her creative and analytical work. In February 2022, she published her book "As If It Were the Resurrection", a collection that further establishes her as a compelling voice in contemporary Arabic literature.

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.

LOVE

Love is simple.

It's like watching television,
mugs of tea warming our hands after supper.

A quiet smile of contentment,
a soft kiss on the cheek, not the lips.

Just warmth.
Two colors blending into a third
neither one overpowers the other.

A peaceful stillness.
A shared need to turn down the world's noise
and sit together in the quiet.

But love is also a backyard barbecue,
your heart laid out like a feast for the hungry.

Scorched meat.
A stranger biting down on a piece of your soul.

Jarring sounds,
like teeth grinding in the dark.

A wind that tears the roof clean off,
leaving you shivering and exposed.



Nehad Zaki

DISNEY

He built a castle by the sea,
stone by stone,
carrying each one in his hands.

Yesterday, he drew up the plans in full:
high walls to surround the city,
to keep out the vampires, the vultures, the beasts,
barbed wire coiled tight around them,
hiding invisible monsters from the world below.

From the castle balcony,
the princess will keep watch,
waiting for the devil she once loved
to cross through eternity and the wars of the end times,
so she can let down her golden hair.

SCAR TISSUE

Everyone here has gotten good at pretending.
They see love,
and put on the feeling like a perfect costume.

I see love in the mirror, too.
He lifts a hand,
so I lift mine.
We wave at each other.

Air kisses,
scar tissue on the face.

A MOMENT LIKE THIS

The stars line up on the bedroom ceiling.
Infatuation is born in a moment like this.

An eye that can't stop looking into another eye,
an eye that died a thousand times
before desire whispered it back to life,
still hungry for the sight.

You release a sigh, and love mixes with the air,
which grows heavy,
has weight and scent.



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Sameh Mahgoub is a distinguished Egyptian poet and a graduate of the prestigious Faculty of Dar Al Uloom. An active figure in the international literary scene, he has participated in major cultural festivals across the Arab world, including in Tunisia, Morocco, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Algeria, and Jordan. His expertise is recognized through his roles on the jury committees for prestigious state awards. Mahgoub's celebrated work has earned him numerous accolades, such as the Ahmed Shawky Shield, the Al-Babtain Award for his poem "On the Rhythm of His Laughter, He Walks,"

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Salwa Gouda.



WOMEN AT FORTY

Women at forty
don't understand
how time slips by,
so caught up
in the soul's footsteps
echoing through the streets.

Women at forty
know exactly the space
between a word
and silence.
They tell little lies
like children do
while life stitches its patterns
across their brows.

They laugh like children
when desire lingers
in front of them,
and when a blush
colors their cheeks
like first light.

Women at forty
still don't know where
storms gather
or how to offer the night
flowers that won't fade,
or how
to walk ahead
without looking back.

Sameh Mahgoub

continued overleaf..

They don't dance
on their fine-boned heels—
too slender, too delicate.

Women at forty
still carrying dawn's
restlessness
in heavy-lidded eyes,
still ripened
by winds from far-off hills
rising,
full-bloomed,
alluring,
gentle,
unyielding,
claiming their ground
without surrender.

As though they were the sun
fastening a gold earring
above the navy yard.

As though they were the night
plucking a hidden rose
from velvet folds
draped over
sleeping girls.

Women at forty
the hidden meaning
of violets in every poem,
the live coal of metaphor
that poets throw
at keepers of rules.

FREE FLOWING

Her stride is a spontaneous blues
 played in the mind of a cello
 a joy slipped through the night,
 selling gardenias
 to the first street-corner mystic
 whose eyes swam with color.

Her stride
 a moon dancing a slow tango
 in the rain,
 an orchestra of dark hours
 ringing to the beat of the upright piano.

Hey, sidewalk
 hey, flower-seller
 hey, stoop
 hey, neighbors on the block:
 pause at the corner and sing it low:
 "Sweet morning, sweet dew
 Sweet morning, our day is gardenias."

Her stride
 like the tide's hungry return
 from a journey through the dark,
 like the warmth of sheltered coves,
 like water's thirst
 that pulls back
 until meaning stands naked,
 then rushes,
 then drowns
 in what can't be seen.

It stills
 the wind sweeps it away.
 It swells
 sorrow sweeps it away.

Her stride is the sea
 in all its deep-blue glory,
 walking herself to shore.

Her stride
 oh, her stride
 the gardenias strewn
 in doorways haunted me.
 That tipsy high-heel haunted me,
 treading the pavement
 with ache and tenderness.

Her stride
 that dance between the real and the felt
 who gives the canvas its spell?
 Who walks toward the other?
 The lover's blues
 or the painter's grief?

Her stride
 oh, her stride
 I went out hunting deer,
 and was caught
 by the eyes of the deer.

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